

Education and Manpower Bureau Circular No. 20/2003

Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services

[Note: This circular should be read by:

- (a) Supervisors, heads and teachers of all kindergartens - for necessary action; and
- (b) Heads of sections - for information]

Summary

The purpose of this circular is to inform kindergartens (KGs) of the schedule and measures adopted to harmonise KGs and child care centres (CCCs) with effect from the 2005/06 school year. **[Date of implementation revised on 26 November 2003]**

Details

2. After consulting the pre-primary sector and the general public, the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services, formed between the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), has recommended and the Government accepted the following measures to harmonise the pre-primary services:

On admission age and monitoring authority

- (a) the minimum age for KG education should remain at 3;
- (b) the edu-care services for children aged 3 to 6 should be provided at KGs and regulated by the Education Ordinance, while child care services for children aged 0 to 3 at CCCs should be regulated by the Child Care Services Ordinance (CCSO). A joint office staffed by EMB and SWD officers and managed by EMB should be set up to monitor the co-located education and care services. Special child care centres

should continue to be placed under the supervision of SWD and regulated through CCSO;

On monitoring of KG-cum-CCCs

- (c) KG-cum-CCCs receiving children aged 2-6 and including centres for children aged 0-6, though governed by different ordinances, will be monitored by one authority, the joint office, in order to provide one-stop service;

On service alternatives to children aged 0 to 3

- (d) while promoting home and family care for infants below the age of 3, day crèches (DCs) will continue to exist for needy families. Because of the declining population of children aged 0-3 (149 092 in 2001 against 195 165 in 1996, about 25% drop), the demand and enrolment for DC service have been decreasing over the past years. To cater for the changing needs of families as a result of social change, a variety of non-institutional care services will be developed in parallel to provide more options for parents with child care need but having no other alternatives;

On ancillary services

- (e) ancillary services including Integrated Programme (IP), Extended Hours Service and Occasional Child Care Service would remain under SWD's purview;
- (f) Integrated Kindergarten (IKG), now under EMB, will gradually be phased out and the resources of IKG will be transferred to SWD for creating additional IP places in phases;

On staffing standards and operational requirements

- (g) the minimum ratio of teacher / child care worker (CCW) to children aged 2 to 6 should be 1:15. The minimum ratio for children aged 0 to 2 should remain at 1:8;
- (h) the minimum floor space requirement for children aged 2 to 6 is 1.8 m² net activity area per child, while for children aged 0 to 2 is 2.8 m² net activity area per child or 3.3 m² per child with both activity area and ancillary area included;
- (i) operators should be given the option to provide meals through their own kitchen or licensed caterers;

On assistance to service providers

- (j) the 5% Subsidy Scheme for CCCs will no longer be in place. The ambit of the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme should be expanded to cover CCCs. The rate of subsidy for children aged 2 to 6 will be based on groups of fifteen children or part thereof, while that for children aged 0 to 2 will be based on groups of eight children or part thereof, taking full account of the statutory staff to children ratio of 1:8 applicable to DCs;

On meal charge

- (k) a meal charge (not exceeding \$400 per month for children aged 2-6 and \$500 for children aged 0-2) would be included in the inclusive monthly fees and subject to fee remission under Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS);

On assistance to parents

- (l) one single means-testing mechanism should be adopted to determine financial assistance to all pre-primary children. The ambit of the KGFRS applicable to KG children will replace the existing Fee Assistance Scheme (FAS) and be expanded to cover children attending CCCs. Full day rate of fee remission for all pre-primary children is only payable upon proof of 'social needs'. Children aged 3-6 attending a half-day day nursery (DN) now not eligible for financial assistance under the FAS will become eligible under the new arrangement;

On transitional arrangements

- (m) the "no worse-off" principle applying to beneficiaries under the existing KGFRS and FAS would also cover those children to be transferred from DCs to DNs / KG-cum-DNs and transferred between institutions during the transition;

On staff issues

- (n) all serving and trained CCWs and KG teachers would be mutually recognized by EMB and SWD as Registered Teachers/Qualified Kindergarten Teachers (QKTs) and CCWs upon harmonisation without further qualification assessment or requirement of attending conversion courses;
- (o) existing service coordinators of CCCs subvented by SWD will be

- grandfathered till their retirement/resignation;
- (p) the minimum standard requirement for KG-cum-CCC is one supervisor who can either be a registered child care supervisor or a kindergarten principal;

On performance indicators

- (q) there would be only one performance monitoring system for KG-cum-CCCs;

On implementation plan

- (r) harmonisation would be implemented from the school year 2005/06 to allow more time for the sector and the public to be prepared for the changes .

3. The Working Party is now making preparatory work for harmonisation of KGs and CCCs, including the arrangements for registration of schools and teachers, calculation of room capacity, and the various assistance schemes for service providers and parents. KGs will be informed of the arrangements in due course.

4. Information on harmonisation of the pre-primary services is available at the EMB website (<http://www.emb.gov.hk/aid/hps/english/index.htm>).

Enquiry

5. For enquiries, please contact the Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services Section of the Quality Assurance Division, EMB at 2117 7446.

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